

**SHORT FORM BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION
THREATENED, ENDANGERED, PROPOSED, AND SENSITIVE (TESP) BOTANY
MALHEUR NATIONAL FOREST**

PROJECT NAME: Loco Thin Wildfire Resiliency Farm Bill CE Project

LOCATION: West of highway 395 and east of Forest Road 37, within and near insect and disease pockets in the Flat, Marshall Devine, and Silvies Project Areas. Project will be 3,000 acres or less. T 18 S, R 30 E, Section 23T 18 S, R 31 E, Sections 19, 20, 29, 30, 31, 32T 19 S, R 31 E, Sections 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22T 19 S, R 30 E, Sections 13, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, 36

DISTRICT: Emigrant Creek Ranger District

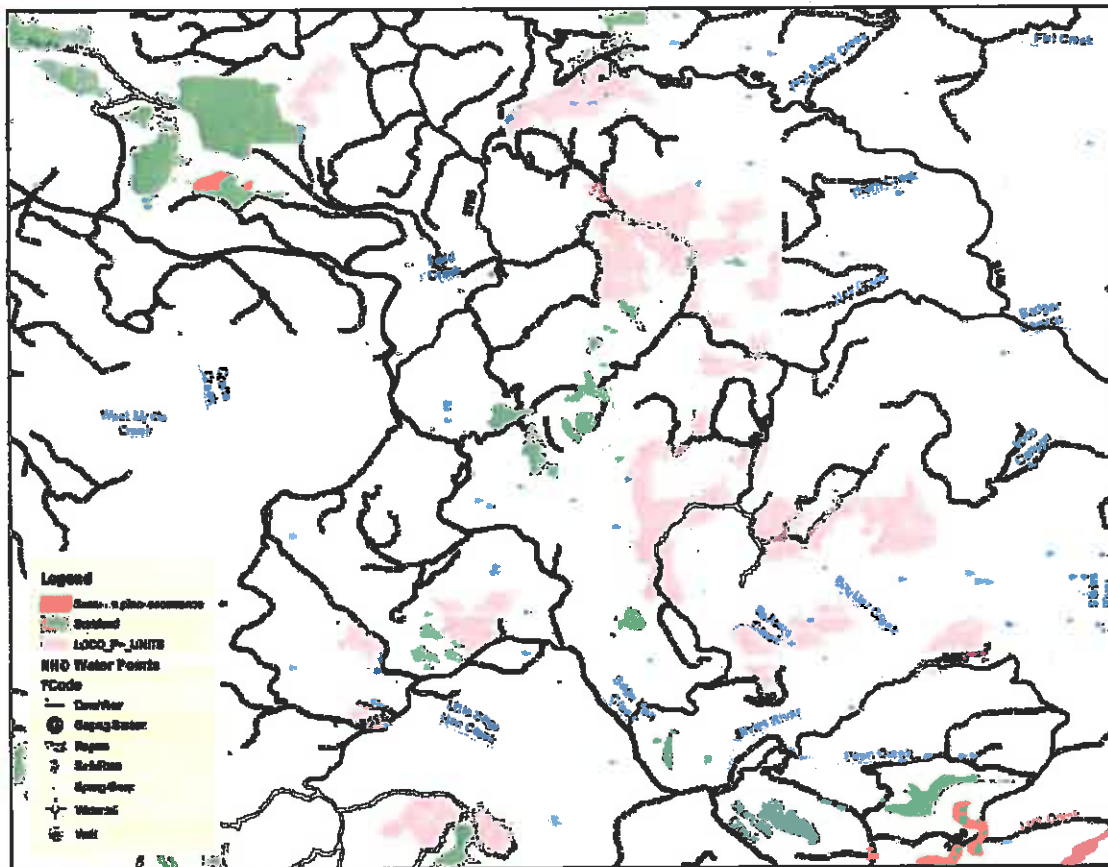
SUBBASIN, WATERSHEDS, (SUBWATERSHEDS) and COUNTY: *Silvies River; Middle and Upper Silvies; MyrtleCreek, Flat Creek-Silvies River, Stancliffe Creek-Silvies River, Sagehen Creek-Silvies River, Dog Creek-Silvies River.*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION and PURPOSE: This project will be completed under the Wildfire Resilience CE but would also reduce the risk or extent of insect and disease infestation. Hazardous fuels would be reduced by reducing stocking levels to the lower management zone for ponderosa pine as recommended by Powell (1999) and Cochran and others (1994) on 3,000 acres or less. Standing dead trees would also be removed to reduce hazardous fuels. Thinning would occur throughout the diameter range (up to 21" DBH for all species) and would remove most of the understory, favoring ponderosa pine over Douglas-fir and grand fir between the overstory groups, and leaving replacement trees for the declining overstory. Basal areas would range from 30-60 square foot per acre. Harvest-generated logging slash would either be removed to the landing through whole tree yarding or if cut-to-length logging methods are used, machine and/or hand piled and burned in the unit. The purpose is to reduce hazardous fuels and reduce the risk or extent of insect and disease infestation.

PRE-FIELD REVIEW:

The following TESP species have potential habitat or documented occurrences in the affected subwatersheds: There are no documented occurrences of any TESP plant species within the project planning area. The closest documented TESP site is in the Myrtle Creek subwatershed where there are two occurrences of Idaho sedge in meadow systems upstream from the Loco project planning area. Inside the project area, the majority of the units are in upland dry coniferous forest habitat which generally does not have a high probability of sensitive species. However, it could potentially support a few TESP species in smaller microhabitats such as western ground cedar. There is also a small amount of scabland habitat within unit boundaries, which could potentially support Region 6 TESP species such as Wallowa needlegrass, Henderson's needlegrass, and Raven's lomatium which is rare on the Malheur National Forest. There are also several distinct springs or seeps within the area that could potentially harbor sensitive moonworts or mosses which depend on these intact groundwater-dependent ecosystems. See map for areas of scabland and springs within units.

Figure 1. Map of Idaho sedge sites, scabland habitat, and documented springs in relation to Loco proposed action units. The sensitive plant sites in the bottom right corner are outside the affected subwatersheds.



Designated or proposed critical habitat for Threatened or Endangered species in affected subwatersheds: No

Proximity of project to TESP species habitat: The project has a small amount of sensitive scabland and seep/spring habitat within unit boundaries.

Project is compliant with any applicable species recovery plans, management plans, etc.: Yes

FIELD RECONNAISSANCE:


Field reconnaissance required: No

PROTECTION MEASURES: Follow PDCs for botanical resources - No machinery or ground disturbance within or at the interface of scablands or springs/seeps.

DETERMINATION OF EFFECTS: In the dry coniferous forest area with ground disturbance the determination is MIIH (May Impact Individuals or Habitat) for any potential sensitive microhabitats or undocumented TESP species occurrences. However, in the aforementioned sensitive habitats if no ground disturbance occurs there would be NI (No Impact) to the habitat or any species potentially occurring there. The determination for the Idaho sedge sites located nearby would also be NI.

RATIONALE FOR DETERMINATION OF EFFECTS: The ground disturbance from the project could potentially disturb sensitive plant species that haven't been documented in the dry coniferous forest habitat. Not all sensitive plant species emerge every year or only put up above-ground parts at certain times of the year, therefore there's a chance that sensitive species are present despite not being documented. In the scabland and springs/seeps, if there is no ground disturbance to the area there should be no impact on any sensitive plant sites or their habitat. The soils of these habitats are much more sensitive than those of dry coniferous forest which necessitates the project design criteria to protect them. The Idaho sedge sites located nearby would also see No Impact from the proposed action due to being located within a protected sensitive habitat as well as being upstream from activities.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS: The Silvies Canyon EIS, Flat Vegetation Management EA, and Marshall Devine HFRA EA all shared similar design criteria that would prevent any ground disturbance in sensitive habitats. Therefore in scablands and spring/seep habitat and for the TESP species potentially occurring there, there would be no cumulative effects. However, because all overlapping ground disturbing activities in these vegetation projects occurred or will occur within the dry coniferous forest habitat, there is small potential for there to be minor cumulative effects to any undocumented sensitive microhabitats or TESP species occurrences within it through effects like hydrological changes to microhabitats or physical crushing or uprooting of plants by machinery. Because the frequency and abundance of such habitats and species on the Malheur National Forest are so low to begin with, it is unlikely that any effects seen from the interaction of these projects would be strong enough to produce a downward trend in populations. The cumulative effects would still be MIIH.

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